



Acehnese Tombstones: Symbolization of Status during the Peak of Islamic Civilization in South Sulawesi

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Abstract. Burial culture in the Indonesian archipelago exhibits a wide variety of forms that reflect the historical and cultural background of different periods, one of which is represented by the use of tombstones. In Indonesia, tombstones are classified into several types as outlined by Hasan Muarif Ambary, namely Acehnese tombstones, Demak-Troloyo tombstones, Bugis tombstones, and Ternate–Tidore tombstones. Over time, these types have been found widely distributed across the archipelago, with Acehnese tombstones being among the most extensively dispersed throughout Indonesia. The use of Acehnese tombstones by various communities cannot be separated from the influence of the Aceh Sultanate, which indirectly introduced these tombstones as a form of burial culture specifically associated with certain social groups. South Sulawesi is one of the regions influenced by the spread of Acehnese tombstones. This phenomenon is closely related to historical connections between the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate and the kingdoms of South Sulawesi. As a result, several types of Acehnese tombstones have been identified in South Sulawesi, particularly on the graves of individuals who held strong political influence or noble status. Consequently, the use of Acehnese tombstones is often interpreted as a representation of the social status of the deceased. This interpretation is supported by the artistic qualities, rich decorative motifs, symbolic meanings, and production processes of Acehnese tombstones, which made them a prestigious cultural product favored by certain groups, especially during the height of Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago.

Keywords: First Keyword, Second Keyword, Third Keyword

1. Introduction

Acehnese tombstones are among the most widely distributed types of tombstones found throughout Indonesia. Although they represent a distinctive cultural heritage of the Aceh Sultanate, these cultural products became highly popular among certain social groups in regions outside Aceh, demonstrating their broad cultural influence. Acehnese tombstones reflect a high level of artistic creativity, carved from stone by highly skilled and experienced craftsmen. Consequently, they are often associated with individuals of high social status, as only elites were able to commission such tombstones as a visible expression of power, authority, or influence that endured even after death. In several cultural contexts, social status can be identified through mortuary practices, including funeral ceremonies, grave forms, and grave goods deliberately placed within burials [1]. Therefore, individuals with power or influence often expressed their social existence through mortuary culture. Acehnese tombstones represent one such cultural

expression, as their use required advance commissioning due to the complex and labor-intensive production process.

Acehnese tombstones constitute an important form of past cultural heritage and have frequently become objects of scholarly research because of their uniqueness in terms of form, ornamentation, material, and the historical narratives they embody, many of which remain insufficiently explored. Acehnese tombstones exhibit a wide distribution, extending from the Malay Peninsula and Pattani in Thailand to various regions across Indonesia [2]. Scholarly research on Acehnese tombstones—commonly referred to as *Batu Aceh*—began during the Dutch colonial period in 1914, when J.J. de Vink documented approximately 300 Acehnese tombstones using rubbing techniques in Banda Aceh and Pasai. Subsequent studies were further developed by Othman M. Yatim, who examined the distribution of Acehnese tombstones in the Malay Peninsula and established a typological classification. Together with Hasan Muarif Ambary, he also formulated a periodization of Acehnese tombstone typologies [3]. Acehnese tombstones are typically characterized by ornamental features known as *winged bucrania*, which resemble buffalo horns carved on the outer sides and apex of the tombstone from a single block of stone. These ornaments display a rich combination of motifs derived from Prehistoric, Islamic, Hindu, and local cultural traditions. The diversity and complexity of decorative elements elevated Acehnese tombstones to a prominent cultural product introduced by the Samudera Pasai Sultanate in Aceh.

Several studies suggest that the presence of Acehnese tombstones represents both the advancement of Islamic culture and material evidence of Islamization processes in Indonesia. This interpretation is supported by the widespread distribution of Acehnese tombstones in regions experiencing Islamic expansion. The Islamization process was strongly influenced by the Samudera Pasai Sultanate, later succeeded by the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate, which reached its political and cultural zenith between the early 16th and mid-17th centuries under Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607–1636) and Sultan Iskandar Thani (1636–1641). According to Leigh (1989), this period was marked by significant developments in culture and the arts, supported by the employment of artists, craftsmen, metalworkers, and other specialists. Under this leadership, Aceh expanded its territorial control across Sumatra and the western Malay Peninsula and established strong relations with other major kingdoms throughout the Indonesian archipelago [4].

Acehnese tombstones can be classified into several types, including *plakpling* tombstones from Samudera Pasai, marble tombstones, tombstones from the Aceh Darussalam period, and tombstones associated with Bugis rulers and Habibs [4]. This study focuses specifically on tombstones from the Aceh Darussalam period due to their wide geographic distribution and intensive use across Indonesia, particularly in South Sulawesi. Their prevalence reflects their association with elite social groups and high-status individuals. Previous research indicates that Acehnese tombstones evolved from relatively simple forms into increasingly elaborate and artistically complex designs, thereby enhancing their cultural and symbolic value. The widespread introduction of Acehnese tombstones coincided with the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda, during which Islamic influence expanded across the archipelago. Artistic freedom and cultural advancement during this period enabled artisans to produce tombstones with lavish ornamentation, combining Hindu-Buddhist, Prehistoric, Islamic, and local artistic traditions into intricate and densely carved stone monuments. These artistic achievements elevated Acehnese tombstones into prestigious cultural commodities

favoured by select social groups. Based on these observations, this study aims to further investigate the use of Acehnese tombstones as indicators of social status, with a particular focus on South Sulawesi as a region with a significant concentration of such tombstones.

2. Acehnese Tombstones in South Sulawesi

South Sulawesi was among the regions that received Islamic influence relatively later through the Samudera Pasai Sultanate, following earlier Islamization in areas such as Minangkabau, Palembang, Jambi, the Malay Peninsula, Demak, Gresik, Banjar, and eastern regions including Ternate, Tidore, Bacan, and Buton. The spread of Islam in South Sulawesi is believed to have been carried out by Islamic scholars from the Malay world, commonly known as the *Datu Tellue*, around the late 16th century. These figures included Abdul Kadir Datuk Tunggal (Datuk ri Bandang), Sulung Sulaeman (Datu Pattimang), and Khatib Bungsu (Datuk ri Tiro). Their missionary activities were conducted separately across different regions: Datuk ri Bandang propagated Islam in the Gowa–Tallo Kingdom, Datuk Pattimang in the Luwu Kingdom, and Datuk ri Tiro in the Tiro region of Bulukumba. Islam was officially adopted in South Sulawesi in the early 17th century, marked by the conversion of King I Malingkang Daeng Manyonri Karaeng Tunamanga ri Bontobiraeng on the night of Friday, 22 September 1605 (9 Jumadil Awal 1014 AH)[5].

The official adoption of Islam by one of the major kingdoms in South Sulawesi introduced significant social and cultural changes. However, Islamization did not occur uniformly across the region. Some areas initially resisted Islamic influence, while others experienced forced conversion through warfare, such as the *musu selleng* (holy war) aimed at Islamizing several Bugis kingdoms. Nevertheless, Islam was more firmly established through Muslim traders who engaged in commerce and intermarriage with local populations. Alongside large-scale Islamization, South Sulawesi became a site of cultural exchange, including changes in burial practices. Prior to Islam, local communities practiced Protohistoric burial traditions, characterized by strong ancestral beliefs and distinct mortuary customs. These included east–west oriented burials accompanied by grave goods such as bowls, jars, storage vessels, and valuable imported items. Pre-Islamic South Sulawesi recognized two primary burial types: primary burials and secondary burials, with or without containers. Non-container burials involved interment in soil, stone, caves, trees, or water, often wrapped in cloth or mats. Container burials used ceramic jars or wooden coffins such as *erong* (Toraja), *duni* (Bugis), and *allung* (Makassar and Mandar) [6]. With the arrival of Islam, the use of tombstones was introduced, accompanied by north–south grave orientation in accordance with Islamic principles. Initially, Islamic graves were relatively simple; however, as artistic demands increased, tombstones became a medium for artistic expression, including carving and engraving. This development led to the emergence of diverse tombstone forms in South Sulawesi, including Acehnese tombstones. South Sulawesi is currently one of the regions with the highest number of Acehnese tombstone findings in Indonesia.

Approximately 57 Acehnese tombstones have been identified across several regencies, including Palopo, North Luwu, Wajo, Bone, Soppeng, Barru, Maros, Makassar, Gowa, and Jeneponto. These tombstones are distributed across 20 different archaeological sites and represent various Acehnese tombstone typologies. The following table presents the distribution of Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi

Table 1. Distribution of Acehnese Tombstones in South Sulawesi

Number	Location	Site Name	Number of Graves
1.	Palopo	KM. Lokkoe	4
2.	Luwu Utara	KM. Datu Pattimang	1
3.	Wajo	KM. La Sangkuru Patau	4
4.	Wajo	KM. Jara'e Lagosi	2
5.	Soppeng	KM. Jera Lompoe	2
6.	Bone	KM. We Mappolo Bombang	2
7.	Bone	KM. Petta Mattinroe ri Pallae	3
8.	Bone	KM. Kajao Bone	1
9.	Barru	KM. Pallase Lasee	2
10.	Pangkep	KM. Somba Labakkang	1
11.	Maros	Kampung Belang-Belang	1
12.	Makassar	KM. Raja-Raja Tallo	3
13.	Makassar	Makam Datu Imam Balla Jati	2
14.	Makassar	KM. Datu ri Bandang	1
15.	Gowa	KM. Sultan Hasanuddin	14
16.	Gowa	KM. Arung Palakka	4
17.	Gowa	KM. Karaengta Campagaya	2
18.	Gowa	KM. Syekh Yusuf	3
19.	Jeneponto	KM. Manjang Loe	2
20.	Jeneponto	KM. Tabakka	1

Based on Table 1, it can be observed that the distribution of Acehnese tombstones is widespread across several regions in South Sulawesi, covering approximately eleven cities and regencies with varying quantities. From a historical perspective, the presence of these Acehnese tombstones is closely related to the extent of political power that once dominated South Sulawesi. This relationship is evident from the high concentration of Acehnese tombstones found in Makassar and Gowa, which were core territories of the Gowa–Tallo Kingdom—one of the most influential and powerful kingdoms in the region during its time.

This is followed by the Bone Kingdom, another major political entity where a considerable number of Acehnese tombstones have also been identified. The quantity and distribution of Acehnese tombstones appear to reflect the prominence and political significance of these kingdoms in the past, as well as the strength of their networks and interactions with migrants from the Malay world, particularly those from the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate. The spatial distribution of sites containing Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi is illustrated in the figure below.

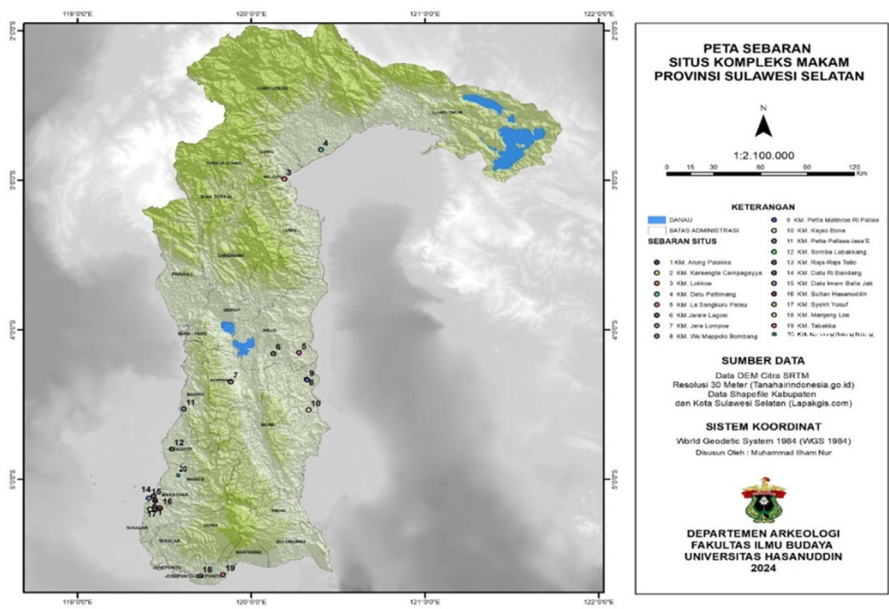


Figure 1 Map of the Distribution of Acehnese Tombstone Sites in South Sulawesi

Based on the distribution of the identified sites, it can be concluded that interest in Acehnese tombstones as cultural products was relatively high. Previous studies indicate that Acehnese tombstones were introduced to South Sulawesi around the 17th century CE, coinciding with the rapid expansion of Islamization in Indonesia, particularly in South Sulawesi, which was initiated by figures from the Malay world, including those associated with the Samudera Pasai Sultanate [7]. The introduction of Acehnese tombstones represents one form of interaction and relationship established between local communities and the Malay world. This connection is supported by historical evidence indicating sustained social and cultural contacts at each location where Acehnese tombstones have been discovered.

These kinship and cultural ties were relatively strong and can be traced back to the activities of Bugis–Makassar traders who were actively engaged in commerce in Aceh during the 16th and 17th centuries. This relationship is further reinforced by traditional Acehnese historiography, which records the genealogy of an Acehnese

sultan descended from a Bugis noble named Daeng Mansyur from Wajo. He was a royal offspring who was shipwrecked in the waters of Pidie and later married the daughter of Teuke Chik of Reubee. From this union, two children were born, namely Putroe Zuni and Zainal Abidin[8] .

These historical traces provide a plausible explanation for the widespread presence of Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi, which flourished particularly during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda. However, following the onset of Dutch colonial intervention in the Malay world, the production of Acehnese tombstones gradually declined. Colonial policies limited the manufacture of non-essential goods and prioritized agricultural production, especially in Aceh after the abdication of Sultan Iskandar Muda [4] . As a result, the dissemination of Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi appears to have ceased around the late 17th century.

3. Users of Acehnese Tombstones in South Sulawesi

Acehnese tombstones were among the cultural products that gained popularity during the peak of Islamic expansion in the Indonesian archipelago. Their forms reflect significant artistic achievements of the period, making them highly sought after by certain social groups who could afford to commission such tombstones. Consequently, Acehnese tombstones were widely used and distributed across several regions of Southeast Asia, including Malaysia.

In Aceh, the use of Acehnese tombstones functioned as a symbol of the social status of the deceased. This is evident from the presence of inscribed names and dates of death, as well as the frequent inclusion of Qur'anic verses and Sufi poetry related to death[9] which enhanced the monumentality and symbolic prestige of the tombstones. This understanding of Acehnese tombstones as markers of status was later adopted beyond Aceh, including in South Sulawesi. Based on research conducted using field data collection, academic literature, and interviews related to Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi, this study compiles data in tabular form presenting the identified users of Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi, as shown below.

Table 2 Figures and History of Acehnese Tombstone Users in South Sulawesi

Number	Sites	Aceh Tombstone Types	Figures and Histories Buried
1.	KM. Lokkoe	Aceh tombstone type M	Nobles of the Luwu Kingdom
2.	KM. Datu Pattimang	Aceh tombstone type C	Nobles of the Luwu Kingdom

		Aceh tombstone type E	Nobles of the Luwu Kingdom
		Aceh tombstone type K	Andi Pattiware' Daeng Parabung Petta Matinroe ri Pattimang (Datu XV Kedatuan Luwu)
3.	KM. La Sangkuru Patau	Aceh tombstone type C and L	La Sangkuru Patau Mula Jaji Sultan Abdurahman (Arung Matoa Wajo XII)
4.	KM. Lagosi	Aceh tombstone type C	Bangsawan Kerajaan Wajo
5.	KM. Jera Lompoe	Aceh tombstone type K	We Tenri Kawareng Putri dari La Tenri Bali (Datu Soppeng XVII)
6.	KM. We' Mappolo Bombang	Aceh tombstone type C	We' Mappolo Bombang (mother of La Patau Matanna Tikka)
		Aceh tombstone type J	Nobles of Bone Kingdom
7.	KM. Petta Matinroe ri Palale	Aceh tombstone type J	La Pakokoe Toangkone Arung Timurung (Father of XV La Patau Matanna Tikka)
		Aceh tombstone type M	Commander of the Cenrana Palace War
8.	KM. Kajao Bone	Aceh tombstone type H	Nobles of Bone Kingdom
9.	KM. Petta Pallase-Lasee	Aceh tombstone type C	Nobles of Tanete Kingdom Barru
10.	KM. Somba Labakkang	Aceh tombstone type C	La Upa Daeng Mattimun Matinroe ri Zikkiri'na (Nobles pf Somba Labakkang)
11.	Kampung Belang-Belang	Aceh tombstone type C	Identity unknown
12.	KM. Raja- Raja Tallo	Aceh tombstone type K	Sultan Mudaffar I Manginyarang Dg. Makkiyo Karaeng Kanjilo Ammalianga ri Timoro (King of Tallo VII)

		Aceh tombstone type J	Madullung Karaeng Bonto Masuqi Karaeng Karuwisi (Nobles of Gowa Kingdom)
13.	KM. Datu ri Bandang	Aceh tombstone type E	Abdul Makmur Khatib Tunggal (Datu ri Bandang)
14.	Makam Datu Imam Balla Jati	Aceh tombstone type M	Datu Imam Balla Jati (figure who spread Islam in Makassar, of Malay origin)
15.	KM. Sultan Hasanuddin	Aceh tombstone type L	Sombangta I Mappaosong Daeng Manngewai Karaeng Bisei Sultan Ali Tumenanga Ridjakarta (king of Gowa KindomXVII)
16.	KM. Syekh Yusuf	Aceh Tombstone type M	Syekh Yusuf Bin Nabi Khiedier (nobles and scholars of the Gowa Tallo Kingdom)
		Aceh tombstone type C	Karaengta Panaikang (wife of Sultan Abdul Djalil sultan Gowa ke XIX)
17.	KM. Arung Palakka	Aceh tombstone tpe C	La Pareppa Tosape Wali Sultan Ismail Tuminanga ri Somba Opu Sultan Ismail (king of Gowa XX)
18.	KM. Karaengta Campagayya	Aceh tombstone type C	Karaengta Campagayya (daughter of Sultan Hasanuddin)
19.	KM. Manjang Loe	Aceh tombstone C	Bulaeng Karaeng Baji (istri I Daeng Binamu Karaeng Tinggi/ Karaeng Rate Binamu kingdom)
20.	KM Tabakka	Aceh tombstone C	Arung Mutara Daeng Tabba Karaeng (Arung keke the first one of Arungkeke)

Table 2 presents several individuals identified as users of Acehnese tombstones in South Sulawesi. The data indicate that those who utilized Acehnese tombstones predominantly belonged to elite social groups, such as nobility and aristocratic classes, who played significant roles in the dissemination of Islam in South Sulawesi. This pattern strongly reinforces the assumption that the use of Acehnese tombstones carried symbolic meaning related to social status. Although the original context of Acehnese tombstone usage in Aceh itself has not been fully determined, evidence from various regions in Indonesia where Acehnese tombstones have been discovered suggests that their use was largely restricted to specific social groups possessing considerable influence and authority. This observation supports the interpretation of Acehnese tombstones as cultural products that functioned as markers of social status for their users.

Based on historiographical studies conducted to trace the backgrounds of Acehnese tombstone users identified in South Sulawesi, it can be concluded that the presence of Acehnese tombstones in the region was closely linked to social interactions between the local communities of South Sulawesi and the users of these tombstones. Contacts with the Malay world are documented in *Lontara* manuscripts, which record interactions and social exchanges between Malay groups and Bugis kingdoms in South Sulawesi. These records indicate the following:

“Setelah Wé Pattékétana menginjak kanak-kanak, orang tuanya kemudian merayakan pesta hajatan *matteddo* (ritual pemasangan anting-anting). Beliau mengundang semua Arung (Raja) *Tellumpocoe* (Bone, Soppeng, Wajo) datang menghadiri pesta bersama-sama. Demikian pula dengan kerajaan bawahan *Pitu Babangminanga*, kerajaan *Turate*, orang Jawa, dan orang Melayu dijemput juga datang. Arumpone (Raja Bone) di dalam pesta itu menyerahkan mahkota kerajaan Pattiro kepada anak saudaranya itu. Sementara itu daripada Ayahandanya ia memperoleh mahkota kerajaan Tanete. Daripada ibunya dia diserahkan mahkota kerajaan Mario.”(...)/ (Sumber: *Lontara Tanete*)

Based on the *Lontara* excerpts, the historical context indicates that interactions between the Malay people and the societies of South Sulawesi were highly intensive. It is even noted that Malay communities formed distinct settlements and established a small polity under the authority of the Tanete Kingdom in Barru, known as the Pancana Kingdom. The Pancana Kingdom functioned as a subordinate polity under Tanete and was ruled by a Johor princess of Malay origin. This kingdom can be regarded as a sovereign Malay polity nurtured by Malay communities residing in South Sulawesi [10]. Over time, marital alliances emerged, producing Bugis–Malay descendants in the region. Similar marital contacts with the Malay world also occurred in the Binamu Kingdom in Jenepono, involving the marriage of I Daeng Binamu Karaeng Tinggi—also known as Karaeng Rate or Karaeng Loloa—with a Malay woman named Buleleng Karaeng Baji [11]. The presence of Malay communities is further documented in the Siang Kingdom of Pangkep, where Malay settlements are believed to have existed as early as around 1490 CE. These communities were concentrated in a single area, maintaining their own cultural practices and social regulations, and are estimated to have comprised approximately 40,000 individuals [12]. This evidence suggests that Malay communities were widely distributed and maintained strong networks throughout South Sulawesi, facilitating sustained processes of cultural exchange.

The arrival of Malay communities in South Sulawesi is estimated to have begun around 1490 CE in the Siang Kingdom, primarily for trade purposes, as South Sulawesi had become a major socio-economic hub in eastern Indonesia. Consequently, Malay traders from regions such as Malacca, Johor, Siam, Pahang, Minangkabau, Champa, and Pattani migrated in large numbers to engage in commercial activities, significantly influencing the development of Bugis–Makassar societies [13]. Over time, relations between Malay communities and South Sulawesi societies grew increasingly close. In

the Gowa Kingdom—one of the most powerful polities in the region—Malay communities were granted special privileges and honored status during the reign of Gowa X, Tunipalangga Ulaweng (1546–1565). During this period, a Malay descendant named I Mangambari Karaeng Mangaweang was appointed as the first village head (*kapala kampung*) and simultaneously served as the harbor master (*syahbandar*) [14] Malay migration to South Sulawesi continued, initially driven by commercial interests following the fall of the Malacca Sultanate to the Portuguese, which forced many Malay traders to seek new trading centers. Several decades later, this migration was followed by formal Islamization missions led by three Minangkabau scholars tasked with disseminating Islamic teachings in South Sulawesi [15]

Three scholars were Abdullah Ma'mur Khatib Tunggal (Datuk ri Bandang), Datuk Sulaiman (Datuk ri Pattimang), and Khatib Bungsu (Datuk ri Tiro), who played key roles in the official acceptance of Islam in Makassar on 22 September 1605 [[16] However, several sources also indicate that prior to the conversion of the Gowa Kingdom, Islam had already been introduced to other regions, including the Luwu Kingdom, the Tiro area, and Selayar Island [15]. This historical trajectory underscores the vital role of Malay communities in shaping the history of South Sulawesi, as evidenced by literary sources and archaeological remains such as Acehnese tombstones, which became highly valued cultural products among high-status groups in the region.

4. Conclusion

Acehnese tombstones are among the types of gravestones widely found and distributed across several regions in South Sulawesi. Based on an analysis of their distribution patterns using a historiographical approach, the presence of Acehnese tombstones is closely associated with the social systems established between South Sulawesi communities and Malay populations who had been active in trade since the early 15th century CE. The arrival of Malay communities facilitated the exchange of cultural products, including Acehnese tombstones, which became particularly prestigious objects among certain social groups. The widespread discovery of Acehnese tombstones reinforces the assumption that their use functioned as a form of status symbolism during the period in question. In South Sulawesi, Acehnese tombstones were predominantly reserved for elite groups, such as nobility and aristocrats, who held significant social and political influence. Thus, Acehnese tombstones serve as material evidence of social stratification and cultural interaction during the height of Islamic civilization in South Sulawesi.

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